

## SNOW PLOW DRIVER UNHURT IN FIERY CRASH

A Transportation Cabinet snow plow operator walked away from a horrific crash recently. Robert Berlin who works on the Calloway County Highway Crew, knows the value of a safety belt. He credits it with saving his life.

While he was plowing snow on KY 121 west of Murray just after 2:00 a.m., Monday morning, Berlin's snow plow went into a skid after being passed by a tractor-trailer and rolled over into a ditch near the Stella Community. The truck was destroyed when it caught on fire.

"He passed me on a slick spot where there was about two inches of ice," Berlin said. "The wind from his truck started the back end of mine swaying. I was trying to control it, but it kept swaying back and forth and eventually started sliding. The plow caught the edge of the road and rolled me over in the ditch."

The 1996 single axel International loaded with 10 tons of salt with a 10-foot snow blade mounted on the front came to rest upside down entangled in an electric fence. The six year highway department veteran credits his safety belt with keeping him from being seriously harmed.

"I was most definitely glad I was wearing my seat belt," Berlin said. "I had an experience driving my personal truck about 15 years ago when I didn't have a seat belt on and had a crash and went flying out the windshield. I'm glad that didn't happen this time."

As he unbuckled the belt and started crawling out he heard electricity arcing and could see sparks spewing from wires underneath the dash of the truck. He realized the mixture of sparks and spilling fuel would not be a good combination.

"I looked up under the dash and saw the wires up under there were burning. I decided I needed to get out of the truck in a hurry," Berlin said.

Just after he climbed to safety the truck burst into flames. Berlin used his personal cell phone to call for help. With slick roads slowing down emergency response vehicles it took more than half an hour for help to arrive.

Since there was no contact between the tractor-trailer and the snow plow it is unlikely the big rig driver could be charged with running the snow plow off the road.



"I wish he would have noticed," Berlin said. "We didn't have any contact. But he passed on an upgrade and a slight curve. When we went back out there to clean up the spilled fuel I realized there is a yellow line where he passed. He wasn't supposed to be passing there."

"We're just thankful that Robert wasn't injured," said Chief District Engineer Ted Merryman. "We're hoping this will serve as a reminder that motorists need to slow down and give our plows plenty of space."

Merryman noted that snow plows are subject to the same slick road conditions as other vehicles.

"The public gets used to seeing our equipment out on the road, so they sometimes don't realize there are people operating that equipment facing some pretty tough weather conditions to clear the roads for everyone else," Merryman said. "We continue to remind motorists to be especially careful when they are driving near our equipment."

Berlin has a request of his own to share with drivers.

"I just wish everyone would pay more attention to our vehicles and to the signs we put out notifying drivers they are approaching work zones," Berlin said. "Drivers need to be aware of those of us who are out there working on roads. They also need to slow down when they see our vehicles or see a crew out there working."